DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 531 FL 018 613

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TITLE English Connective Words in Interaction between Native and Non-native Speakers.
PUB DATE Mar 90
NOTE 12p.; This paper is based on portions of a paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Kyusyu Academic Society of English Language Education (18th, Kumamoto, Japan, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bilingual Teachers; College Students; *Conversational Language Courses; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Limited English Speaking; Native Speakers; *Second Language Learning; *Speech Communication; Videotape Recordings
IDENTIFIERS *Connectives (Grammar); Conversational Flow

ABSTRACT

Ten Japanese college students who were taking an English conversation class, but had low-level verbal skills, were studied through six videotaped conversational sessions between them and their teachers to examine English connective words such as "oh," "so," and "OK" in the conversational setting of native and non-native interactions. The study examined the native speaker's conversational strategies, focusing on what connective words were used, and how they were used in encouraging non-native (beginner-level) students to go on talking. Analyses showed a certain patterns in teachers' verbal behaviors that functioned to keep the conversation alive. Although teachers were not supposed to control the conversation, they contributed much to the natural flow of the conversations by the frequent use of such connectives as "oh," "so," and "OK." "Oh" was most frequently used as a marker of receipt of information (29.6%) and recognition of old information (25.95%). "So" was most often used as a marker of prodding (35.9%). "OK" appeared most often in the transition of the topic (50.6%), especially as a marker of the conclusion of the topic (22.5%). (GLR)

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English Connective Words In Interaction Between Native And Non-Native Speakers*

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九州共立大学工学部

研究報告第14号抜刷

1990年3月

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English Connective Words In Interaction Between Native And Non-Native Speakers*

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Abstract

This study deals with English connective words such as *oh*, *so*, and *OK* in the conversational setting of native and non-native interactions. In the interactional environment between native and non-native speakers, employment of some kinds of connective words by native speakers can be assumed to encourage non-native (beginner-level) students to go on talking. We will look at the native speaker's conversational strategies, focusing on what connective words are used and how they are used.

The language data for this study was obtained by videotaping six sessions of English conversations between students and teachers. Five pairs of Japanese college students were invited to the sessions. The five pairs consisted of three male/male pairs, one male/female pair and one female/female pair. All the subjects were taking an English conversation class at the time, but still had low-level verbal skills.

Having analysed our data, we found a certain pattern in teachers' verbal behaviors, which functioned to keep the conversation alive. Although teachers were not supposed to control the conversation, they contributed much to the natural flow of the conversations by the frequent use of such connectives as *oh*, *so*, and *OK*. We investigate the functions of connectives used, considering their specific environments. Further, we compare students' usage of these connectives with teachers', and suggest their important roles in the simplified speeches.

1. INTRODUCTION

"I can't speak English." Every teacher of English in Japan must have heard this from his or her students countless times. And after six years of study in schools, this is all too often a reality. Students who are not taught conversational management techniques often cannot function in a free-flowing setting.

How do teachers encourage and support their students with low-level verbal skills in order to develop conversational competence? Recently much attention has focused on the role of connectives in discourse. These connectives, used in situations where teachers or native speakers are giving support to low-level speakers in actual conversation, may be seen to play an important role in conversational management, enabling the students to receive cues and increasing their understanding. Exactly what role do these connectives play in such conversations?

This paper attempts to examine the discourse functions of the English connective words used in the conversational setting of teacher (native) and students (non-native) interactions outside the classroom,

Received September 30, 1989.

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* This paper is based on portions of the paper delivered at the 18th Annual Conference of the Kyusyu Academic Society of English Language Education, Kumamoto, 1989.

focusing on what connective words are used and how they function. What connective words are taken up by native speakers is of great importance here in assisting non-native speakers to understand what conversation is going on. This is because connective words segment conversation and mark the units of discourse. And recognition of the segmentation of conversation is something with which non-native (beginner-level) students have great trouble.

It is generally agreed upon that native speakers of any language, in their talk with non-native speakers, consciously or unconsciously modify their utterances by employing simpler words and less complicated grammatical structures and also provide feedback which assists the non-native speakers in their efforts to communicate, and lets them know whether they have been understood (Ferguson 1971 ; Sinclair and Brazil 1982). The simplified input by native speakers can be assumed to help non-native speakers follow the natural flow of conversation.

We hypothesize that teachers first set up a friendly situation and then encourage non-native (beginner-level) students to participate in the ongoing conversation by employing some kinds of connective words. Among others, we put focus on three connective words *Oh*, *So*, and *OK* and investigate their functions in the discourse slot, considering their specific environments. Furthermore, we compare students' usage of these connectives with teachers' and suggest their important roles in the simplified speeches known as Teacher Talk or Foreigner Talk.

2. DATA

The language data for this study was obtained by videotaping six sessions of English conversations between students and teachers during the lunch-time break. Five pairs of Japanese college students were invited to the sessions. The five pairs consisted of three male/male pairs, one male/female pair and one female/female pair. All the subjects were taking an English conversation class at the time, but still had low-level verbal skills. Both native and non-native teachers of English attended the conversational sessions to serve as helpers, not to control the conversation.

In each session, six five-minute-long conversational sessions were all transcribed. Connective words used, and a more specific breakdown of these words are shown in Table 1.

		Teachers	Students
OK	71 (31.7 %)	70 (42.2 %)	1 (1.7 %)
And	68 (30.4 %)	25 (15.1 %)	43 (74.1 %)
So	39 (17.4 %)	37 (22.3 %)	2 (3.4 %)
Oh	27 (12.1 %)	21 (12.7 %)	6 (10.3 %)
Now	7 (3.1 %)	7 (4.2 %)	0 (0.0 %)
Or	6 (2.7 %)	4 (2.4 %)	2 (3.4 %)
Well	3 (1.3 %)	1 (0.6 %)	2 (3.4 %)
Because	2 (0.9 %)	1 (0.6 %)	1 (1.7 %)
But	1 (0.4 %)	0 (0.0 %)	1 (1.7 %)
Total	224	166	58

Table 1 Connective words used.

3. DISCUSSION

Having analysed the data we obtained, we found some specific patterns in the way the teachers talk to encourage the students. It can be seen that by the frequent use of such connectives as *Oh*, *So*, and *OK*, the teachers contributed much to the flow of the conversations, although they were not supposed to control the conversation.

A. The Functions of Oh

Oh has been traditionally viewed only as an exclamation or interjection. Deborah Schiffrin (1987 : 74)

claims that '*Oh* occurs as speakers shift their orientation to information. Speakers shift orientation during a conversation not only as they respond affectively to what is said, but as they replace one information unit with another, as they recognize old information which has become conversationally relevant, and as they receive new information to integrate into an already present knowledge base.' Thus she defines *oh* as a marker of information management. We isolated five different functions of *oh*s:

	Teachers	Students	Total
A. Receipt of Information			
(a) New Information	4	1	5 (18.5 %)
(b) Unexpected Information	3	0	3 (11.1%)
B. Recognition of Old Information	5	2	7 (25.9 %)
C. Repair	1	1	2 (7.4 %)
D. Shift in Subjective Orientation	4	1	5 (18.5 %)
E. Evaluation	4	1	5 (18.5 %)
	21	6	27

Table 2 Functions of Oh.

Example (1) shows *oh* at (Ab) Receipt of Unexpected Information, (Aa) Receipt of New Information, (E) Evaluation and (D) Shift in Subjective Orientation. In (1), E, a native speaker of English and teacher, is asking why O, a non-native and student, likes baseball.

(1) 30 E : (To Ohara) Did you ever play golf?
31 O : No.
32 E : OK. Why do you like baseball?
33 O : I'm from Nagoya.
34 E : **Oh**.
35 O : Nagoya,
um...professional baseball team Chunichi Dragons.
Top..., Central league top.
36 E : **Oh**, REALLY. **Oh**, great. Uh huh.
37 O : (laughs)
38 E : So, does everybody in Nagoya play baseball?
39 O : Um..
40 E : **Oh**! (laughs) and
(To Hara) why do you like golf? (con.2)

E in line 34 is surprised, saying *oh* upon receiving an unexpected answer *I'm from Nagoya*. The first *oh* in line 36 is just an indication that E has received new information since E did not know that Chunichi Dragons ranks top in Central League while the second *oh* of *Oh, great* in line 36 is not related with a specific question or statement but is rather related with discourse management. That is, the *oh* in line 34 and the first *oh* in line 36 function locally [1] whereas the second *oh* in line 36 works more globally in terms of conversational management. E in line 40 is surprised saying *oh* and shifts her orientaion because E thinks that O's answer in line 39, meaning 'yes' in Japanese, is cute.

Next let us look at an example where *oh* functions as (B) Recognition of Old Information. In (2), K (a non-native student) is talking about a dish he made with meat and *panko*. But he does not know an English word for *panko*, and W, a non-native student, actually points to the bread crumbs on the table in line 53, saying

Here. And now E (a native teacher) understands the meaning of *panko*, repeating *oh* three times.

(2) 47 E : Panko. Is it food?
48 K : Yes.
49 W : Panko is bread, bread.
50 K : Eh, this...
51 E : Just white bread?
52 K : Yes, bread, it's, it's dry.
53 W : Here....
54 E : **Oh**, **oh**, **oh**, bread crumbs!
55 W : Yeah, bread crumbs!
56 E : **Oh**, you made pork cutlet, last night?
You cooked?
57 K : Yes, yes.
58 E : I see
OK. Ask him about his weekend. Yeah. (con. 3)

Oh by E in line 54 indicates that she was able to recognize what *panko* is from the previous context. Now she has got the meaning of *panko* and next she guesses what W made with meat and *panko*. She was confident her guess was right because she employed a discourse marker *oh* in line 56. *Oh* in line 56 is more global functionally than *oh* in line 54 since the statement *you made pork cutlet* is far back beyond a small unit of talk about *what is panko*, relating to the question *What can you cook ?* in line 35 which is not shown in (2).

The following is an example of conversation where a discourse marker *oh* is used as (A) Receipt of New Information and (C) Repair. Both W and K are non-native students. *Oh* in line 26 simply means that W has received new information : K makes miso soup at dinner, not in the morning. However, not only does *oh* in line 29 indicate that W has received known (or old) information *donburi* but that he has added something new *tamago* to it and then asked K to confirm.

(3) 22 W : When you cook miso soup..., えっ, とね,
23 K : I feel, I feel cold, or,
uh, weather is, weather is cold day.
24 W : Morning?
25 K : No. I make it in the dinner.
26 W : **Oh**...what else?
27 All : (laugh)
28 K : What else.
Well, well, donburi.
29 W : **Oh**, Tamago donburi?
30 K : What?
31 W : Tamago donburi?
32 K : Yes, yes. (con. 3)

Next is an example of *oh* used as (D) Shift in Subjective Orientaion. K in line 44 loses the thread of the conversation temporarily when something is wrong with his throat, but after clearing his throat he goes back to the main flow of conversation. In other words, he has shifted his orientation subjectively. So *oh* in (4)

only functions locally, not affecting the global context of the conversation.

(4) 44 K : Uh, yesterday,
I, I was cleaning my room.
And, and, and, (clears throat)
Oh, I...I'm sorry.
And I went, I went shopping.
45 W : Uh, what kind, uh, what kind shopping?
46 K : I bought meat. And Panko. (laugh) (con. 3)

B. The Functions of So

Before examining the functions of *so*, it is important to explain why we have few examples of *because* in our data which counts up to 39 samples of *so*. The difference between *so* and *because* can be found in Schiffrin's (1987 : 217-25) discussion. *So* has a pragmatic use as a marker of potential transition in participation structures,[2] while *because* has no such function. In potential transition locations in talk, *so* has a dual role. It is used as a turn-transition device which marks a speaker's readiness to cancel the opportunity to continue. It also allows a speaker to continue if a hearer does not take an offered turn. In the conversations between natives and low-level non-natives, it can be assumed that non-natives may miss offered turns very often. Natives tend to use *so* very often as turn-transition markers in simplified speech, according to our data.

Let us take a look at the examples of *so*. The functions of *so* are classified and counted as follows.

	Teachers	Students	Total
A. Consequence	3	2	5 (12.8 %)
B. Inference	2	0	2 (5.1 %)
C. Summing up	2	0	2 (5.1 %)
D. Prodding	14	0	14 (35.9 %)
E. Filler	7	0	7 (17.9 %)
F. Initiation	6	0	6 (15.4 %)
G. Correcting oneself	3	0	3 (7.7 %)
	37	2	39

Table 3 Functions of So.

Example (5) shows *so* as (A) Consequence, (F) Initiation, and (D) Prodding. In (5), E, a native teacher, starts a conversation by asking questions about the hearer's family.

(5) 1 E : We know each other already, **so**...
Let me ask you some questions,
so,...about your family,
OK?
Please tell us about your family.
So, Mr Sugiyama.. (con.1)

The first *so* functions as a connective of CONSEQUENCE. Since they know each other, they do not have

to introduce each other. Therefore, E starts to ask questions with *so*. The second *so* is used as a marker to initiate a new discourse topic. We call this function of *so* INITIATION. The third *so* is meant as a signal for a hearer to take a turn. We call this function PRODDING.

Example (6) illustrates *so* as (C) Summing Up, (E) Filler, and (D) Prodding. In (6), E, a native teacher, starts to talk with two female students.

(6) 1 E : OK, that was great.
2 2Ks : (laugh)
3 E : That was loud, too. Very good. Then,
Shall I sit here ? OK. And I was very happy,
because I could understand,
when you were talking about snakes,
"Oh, I understand !"
4 2Ks : (laugh)
5 E : **So**..., you saw a snake...in the mountain ?
6 Ka : Yeah.
7 E : Oh, yeah. (laugh) Yes, scary.
OK, **so**, let's talk again in English,
and more questions,
and talk a little bit more.
OK, **so**, what did you do last week ? (con. 4)

So in line 5 has a summarizing function. E summarizes what both Ks have talked about in the previous conversation. This *so* functions globally beyond small units of discourse. We name this function SUMMING UP. The first *so* in line 7 functions as FILLER. It allows E to fill a gap and to continue her turn. The second *so* in line 7 is used as prodding. The *so* as prodding tends to be followed by questions because this is a signal for a speaker to give up his/her turn to a hearer.

Example (7) shows *so* as (G) Correcting Oneself and (B) Inference. In (7), S, a non-native student, is talking about his brother. E, a native teacher, asks some questions.

(7) 20 S : Yeah
My brother is family computer...
Uh...every day, um, de, de, de, de.
21 E : (laughs)
22 S : Yeah.
23 E : What, **so**, how old is he ?
24 S : He is 15 years old,
and, 何だあれは高校は,
senior high school.
25 E : Um.
26 S : Um. Eh...
27 E : **So**, instead of doing homework,
he plays the computer ?
28 S : Un.

29 E : Um. OK, good. (con.1)

So spoken by E in line 23 is used in order for E to correct herself. By inserting the *so*, E was able to cancel the previous word *what* and replace it with *how* to ask an age-related question. We have named this usage of *so* CORRECTING ONESELF. *So* in line 27 functions as a connective of INFERENCE. E, judging from the previous context, inferes that S's brother plays with the computer instead of doing homework.

C. The Functions of OK

We believe that *OK* is one of the most poorly investigated discourse markers. Though *OK* has been traditionally considered as an adjective, adverb, verb, and noun, we find out that it is used most frequently and effectively as a connective for discourse management in the simplified speech between teachers and those students with low-level conversational skills. In our data which counts up to 71 samples of *OK*, the functions of *OK* were divided into the following categories.

		Teachers	Students	Total
A. Transition...	(a) Beginning	5	0	5 (7.0 %)
	(b) Topic Change	15	0	15 (21.1 %)
	(c) Conclude the Topic	16	0	16 (22.5 %)
B. Continuance		5	0	5 (7.0 %)
C. Request for Agreement		13	0	13 (18.3 %)
D. Agreement		9	1	10 (14.1 %)
E. Approval		4	0	4 (5.6 %)
F. "All Right" (satisfactory)--non-connective		3	0	3 (4.2 %)
		70	1	71

Table 4 Functions of OK.

Example (8) shows *OK* as (Aa) Beginning, (Ac) Conclude the Topic, (Ab) Topic Change, (C) Request for Agreement and (F) "All Right". In (8), E, a native teacher, starts a conversation with T, a female student, and S, a male student.

(8) 1 E : **OK** we're ready.
So, um.. What we'd like to do first...
What's the date? It's the 5th of December, 1988,
and first, could you please tell me,
What's your name?
2 T : My name is Kimiko Taguchi.
3 E : **OK**, great. And what's your name?
4 S : My name is Masashi Saito.
5 E : Thanks. **OK**.
We're eating lunch here and we're going to talk.
So, um, first for about five minutes,
let's just speak English.
OK? And anything is **OK**,
just, especially ask each other questions,

answer, and talk about anything that you like. **OK**?
So...um...please tell me, tell us....what you like to do. (con. 5)

First, let us look at *OK*'s function as (A) Transition. This means that *OK* appears in the transition of the discourse topic. Depending on where it is used in the discourse, we subdivide the function into three sub-functions: (Aa) Beginning; (Ab) Topic Change; and (Ac) Conclude the Topic. *OK* in line 1 is used to start a topic at the beginning of the conversation by E. In line 3 *OK* functions to conclude the short topic. By saying *OK*, E not only signals her understanding but finishes T's turn in order to ask S. The first *OK* in line 5 is an example of topic change. E utters *OK* to fill a gap before introducing a new topic. Next in line 5 we can see *OK* as Request for Agreement. A speaker usually successfully gets hearer's cooperation by saying *OK*? with a rising intonation. The third *OK* in line 5 is not a connective. It simply means *all right* and functions as an adjective.

Example (9) is a good example of *OK* functioning as (Ac) Conclude the Topic. When S, a non-native student, can not answer E's question in line 28, E, a native teacher, gives up asking and decides to conclude the topic by saying *OK, good* in line 29.

(9) 27 E : So, instead of doing homework,
he plays the computer?
28 S : Un.
29 E : Um. **OK**, good.
Um, ask him about his family. (con.1)

Example (10) indicates *OK* as (D) Agreement, (E) Approval, and (B) Continuance.

(10) 76 E : Now? **OK**, shall we stop now?
One more question.
77 Timer : **OK**
78 E : **OK**, so, please.
79 T : Uh.... 難しい.... er..... (con.1)

When E, a native teacher, says *Now?* in line 76, the timer is signaling that the time is up. So E shows her agreement by saying *OK*. Since E hopes to continue the dialogue with T, a non-native student, the timer approves E's suggestion by uttering *OK* in line 77. In line 78 E uses *OK* to continue the interrupted topic. We call this function CONTINUANCE because the content of the topic is not changed. E's question *why do you like it?* is not a newly introduced topic, but a repetition of the previous utterance in line 72 which is not shown here.

4. SUMMARY

This paper puts focus on the connective words used in the conversations between verbally low-level students and native speakers of English or fluent English teachers. It seems clear that in the simplified speeches known as Teacher Talk or Foreigner Talk simple connective words such as *oh, so* and *OK* play an important role in conversational management. By the frequent use of these connectives teachers give support to low-level students, while students who have not acquired the markers for conversational management tend to be silent.

Let us restate the points made in the body of this paper.

(i) *Oh* has such functions as (A) Receipt of New Information, (B) Recognition of Old Information, (C) Repair, (D) Shift in Subjective Orientation, and (E) Evaluation. In our analysis *oh* is most frequently used as a marker of Receipt of Information (29.6 %) and Recognition of Old Information (25.9 %).

(ii) *So* has such functions as (A) Consequence, (B) Inference, (C) Summing Up, (D) Prodding, (E) Filler, (F) Initiation, and (G) Correcting Oneself. It is most often used as a marker of Prodding (35.9 %).

(iii) *OK* has such functions as (A) Transition, (B) Continuance, (C) Request for agreement, (D) Agreement, (E) Approval, and (F) "All right" as non-connective. *OK* appears most often in the transition of the topic (50.6 %), especially as a marker of the conclusion of the topic (22.5 %).

Our research is still preliminary and small in size ; however, it points out the significance of connectives in simplified speech. Further study along this line would be beneficial to the investigation of use of connectives for conversational management.

Notes

1. The first *oh* in line 36 is a response to the immediate previous utterance *Central league top* in line 35 while the second *oh* in line 36 is a response to the whole unit of discourse－line 32 through 35. Thus is a difference between local *oh* and global *oh*.
2. See Schiffrin 1987,pp. 24-6.

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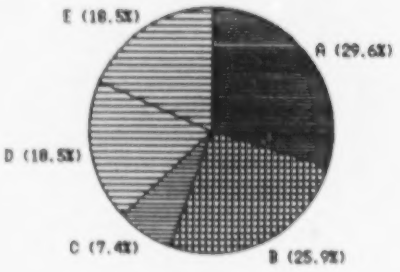
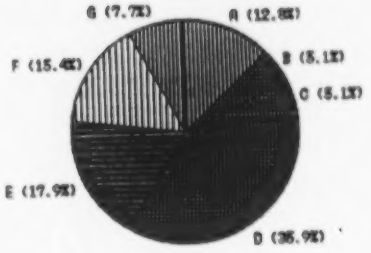
Appendix

Functions of *Oh*	Total
A. Receipt of New Information	8
B. Recognition of Old Information	7
C. Repair	2
D. Shift in Subjective Orientation	5
E. Evaluation	5
	27



Functions of *So*	Total
A. Consequence	5
B. Inference	2
C. Summing Up	2
D. Prodding	14
E. Filler	7
F. Initiation	6
G. Correcting Oneself	3
	39



Functions of *OK*		Total
A. Transition –	Beginning	5
	Topic Change	15
	Conclude the Topic	16
B. Continuance		5
C. Request for Agreement		13
D. Agreement		10
E. Approval		4
F. "All Right"		3
		71